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LOUGH DEARG.

A TALE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY—FOUNDED ON FACT.

By flood or field—by wood or fell—
 In desert wild, or hermit's cell—
 In camp or court—in hall or bow'r—
 At day's broad noon, or midnight hour—
 On mountain top or flow'ry lea—
 Or where in prayer he bends the knee—
 Ay, even before the holy shrine—
 I'll claim him there!—his blood is mine!

MS. Poem.

Lough Dearg, or St. Patrick's Purgatory, was at one time the most famous shrine of penance and purification in Europe. It was by no means an unusual thing for princes from foreign countries to travel from their palaces, in the vain hope of finding rest for their troubled consciences in the performance of a pilgrimage to this island cell. Such repute did this western Purgatory acquire, that a number of the high dignitaries of the church in Italy and other countries, who felt certain bequests and revenues diminishing, began to regard its fame with jealous eyes; and shortly after the circumstances related in the following tale had taken place, a Bull was procured from his Holiness for its total suppression.

In the year 1397 we find it recorded that his most gracious Majesty Richard the Second, King of England, &c. &c. granted his royal letters of safe-conduct to Raymond, Viscount Perilleaux, and Knight of Rhodes, with a train of twenty men and thirty horses, to the place of penance, called Lough Dearg, in the kingdom of Ireland, for the purpose of performing certain religious duties.* It is also recorded that the knightly nobleman never returned to his native country or kindred. Thus far for introductory facts—now we may come to the traditionary part of our narrative.

It was a beautiful and sunny evening in the beginning of the autumn of the above year, and the floods of rich yellow light from the setting sun bathed the woody shores of Lough Dearg, and tipt with gold the wavelets on its bosom. At that period the naked hills that now surround the lake were covered with majestic woods of oak and beech, intermingled with hazel and birch, and fringed with thick copse almost to the water's edge. The little isle on which was situated Saint Patrick's Purgatory lay about a mile from the shore, with its shadowed side, towards the point of embarkation, like a dark spot in the midst of a field of flowing silver.

Teague O'Dogherty, the ferryman to the island, was stretched at his length upon a mossy bank above the surface of the water; his little wherry lay at a small distance, like a dark log floating upon the limpid element. It was moored by a knotted tow-ropes to a stump in the bank. From some cause or other, there was a great dearth of pilgrims at the sainted shrine at this particular season, and Teague had little else to do but loll about from bank to shade, or fish with his long hazel rod in the Lough. While he thus lay, with his *bereadh*† drawn over his eyes to keep off the bright rays of the setting sun, a pilgrim, toiled and travel-stained, arrived on the bank, and stood beside the unconscious Teague. He stirred up the lounging ferryman with the end of his staff. He was a tall man, clad in the usual garb of a religious wanderer of the period. A dark kind of mantle, with loose sleeves, that covered his whole person from the throat to the ankles, was bound round his middle by a white twisted cord, which, after passing twice round his body, was knotted in front, the ends hanging down nearly to his knee. A large hat of foreign manufacture, and strung round the rim with cockle-shells, covered his head, and shadowed an ample and smooth brow, giving, by its shade, a brighter lustre to

the intense fire that burned with a deep and living light in his coal-black eyes. His face was pale and thin, but exceedingly animated and expressive; and his beard of jetty black, curled short, and curving downwards from his mouth, left his care-worn cheek almost bare. His air was gentle and graceful; and though clad in the humble garments of a palmer, his mien and motion were those of a man used to associate with the proud and noble. He was young, too, and Teague remarked that not many penitents of his years had ever sought the healing shrine of St. Patrick at Lough Dearg.

The ferryman raised himself from his reclining position. The pilgrim quietly and unmovedly allowed him to enjoy his stare of wonder; and then slowly pointed with his staff towards the island, as indicating a wish to be ferried over. Teague directed his attention to the setting sun, intimating that the hour was past; and then pointed out where the smoke curled above the trees over his cottage at the skirts of the wood, hinting pretty plainly that the pilgrim should be content with a share in the shelter and hospitality of his humble roof until morning. The stranger bowed in thankfulness, laying the fore-finger of his right hand impressively upon his lips, and raising the other one towards the blue vault of heaven; he then crossed both, with an expressive gesture upon his bosom, and hung down his head in silence.

"Ay, ay," muttered Teague, in an under tone, "a vow to hold his peace—some terrible crime to be atoned for, I warrant me, by the severity of the penance—and in one so young too!" And, with a glance upwards of his eye in astonishment and thankfulness to heaven, he led the way to his cabin.

The evening sun had gone down behind the western hills, and the gloom of coming night was darkening the deep-brown woods. The songs of the robin and thrush were hushed, and the pilgrim was seated beside the cheerful hearth of the ferryman, silent and motionless, wrapt up in the shadowy stillness of profound meditation. Teague was seated at some distance, with his eyes resting with something of surprise upon his tacit guest. He was also busy with his own cogitations—much he marvelled that the holy man at meals or vesper hour had not attempted to offer up his prayers, as was the wont among men devoted, as he seemed to be, to the duties of religion. Both were, however, startled from the depth of their thoughts by the swelling note of a bugle-horn which came pealing from the woods.

Teague started to his limbs, for such sounds were seldom heard on the peaceful shores of the Lake of Penance. The pilgrim also appeared alarmed, for in the inquietude of the moment he cast his flashing eyes to the entrance with a fearful and mystical meaning; and then drawing his ample habit closer round him, seemed to shrink within its folds from scrutiny or observation. When Teague went out, he observed a train of horsemen issuing from the wood. The person who rode foremost, and who appeared to be the chief, was mounted on a beautiful and richly-caparisoned horse of the true Arabian breed, and was dressed in a full suit of the deepest black. A mantle of black velvet, lined with black silk, depended from his shoulders, under which he wore a doublet of fine black cloth, braided with twisted cords of shining silk, and fitting closely to the body; to this were attached trunks and hose of the same material, together with boots of Cordovan-dressed deerskin, reaching loosely to the mid leg. This completed his equipment, except a broad-rimmed hat, from which drooped a solitary black feather, shadowing features, stern, proud, and repulsive in their expression, and yet not bad in the abstract. In years he appeared beyond the middle age of man, for on his brow the white and black hairs were mingled in nearly equal portions. The rest of his attendants were clad, as to fashion, in nearly the same style, except a few who were armed at all points; but the colour was different, as suited the taste of the individual wearer—and the stuff coarser, as indicating, perhaps, the degree of rank. In number they were about twenty—all mounted, some leading baggage-mules and spare horses. They looked as after a long journey, for their cattle were travel-soiled and weary, and their habits dusty, and faces deeply imbrowned. Their fashion

* From the same record we learn, that in the year 1358 permission was given to Nicholas de Baccario, a nobleman of Ferrara, to visit Lough Dearg for penitential purposes; and some time in the same year the like to one Malatesta Ungaro, Knight, who visited the Purgatory with the same intention.

† *Bereadh*—the Irish term for the cap or bonnet worn in Ireland at the time.

and appearance in general differed much from the people of the country—their weapons were even strange—they were evidently men from a foreign land, for they used much gesture in their discourse, and spoke in a strange tongue. Tents were immediately pitched upon the shores of the lake, and fires lighted, and hurry and bustle continued among the strangers until a late hour; and a strict guard was placed upon the pavilion of him who appeared to be their chief.

Teague retired to his low and humble pallet; and was much surprised, on waking towards midnight, to find that his pilgrim guest had not even then sought his heather couch. With a quick and uneasy step he continued to pace the narrow confines of the cottage until grey dawn, and he then roused the ferryman from his broken slumbers. Teague arose in surprise; but the silent and prayerless palmer placed a large silver coin in his hand, and pointed towards the island. The morning mists were still lying on the surface of the lake, as if a fleece of cloud had descended upon it during the hours of darkness; the air was chill, and the songs of the birds were not yet among the branches of the trees. The inhabitants of the tents, except the wakeful sentinels, were still wrapped in silent sleep, as the palmer, with the stealthy step and the cautious glance of a beast of prey, slid down to the shore, taking the advantage of every tree and copse to hide his person from the watchful strangers. Teague unmoored his boat, and they were soon on the shores of the Island of Penance.

In a short time after the return of Teague, he was summoned to the presence of the chief. He (the stranger) looked upon the ferryman with a glance of mingled suspicion and scrutiny, as if he wished to penetrate the thoughts of his secret heart; but the merry blue eye of Teague never blanched from the examination. He then turned towards a person who looked in dress superior to the rest of his attendants, and spoke some words in a low tone, to which the other replied in a style of submissive remonstrance. His objections were, however, overruled, and the nobleman embarked for the island with Teague, and without an attendant.

The cell at that time was a dark cavity, covered with flags and layers of turf. At one end was an altar, raised by one or two steps from the earthen floor; and at the other a small hole, through which the dim light struggled, serving to show the rude structure in all its uncouth and naked simplicity—bare earthen walls, through which the damps oozed and trickled down in sundry places, and in others settled in mildews and blackness. The friar who resided upon the island to receive the donations, and direct pilgrims as to the forms to be observed, and the localities of the place, and who belonged to the Priory of St. Fintan's,* came to receive the stranger, on his landing, with more than his usual courtesy. Here, too, the nobleman showed that he had cause to fear something or somebody, for he shrank from the proffered hand of the monk, and darted on him that sharp, soul-searching look of peculiar meaning which we have before noticed; and then, not seeming to notice the intended civility, he stepped lightly to the land. The penance was a severe trial upon nature: it consisted in fasting for an almost incredible length of time—of lying for a certain number of days and nights upon the damp floor of the little chapel without sleeping—and repeating an innumerable quantity of prayers at certain places and in certain positions.

The nobleman approached the entrance to the dark cell, and paused for a time at the door, and peered anxiously and cautiously into the interior. He ventured a step or two inside, but started back, and stood for some time within the threshold until his eyes became used to the darkness, so different from the light of the glorious morning sun. He was then enabled to distinguish that there was but one more penitent within its walls, who, wrapped closely in a pilgrim's cloak, lay prone upon his face at a

short distance from the altar. He was silent—no sigh, no murmured prayer, escaped his lips; but, as if shaken and absorbed by the contending emotions and thoughts that occupied and agitated him, he heeded not the approaching steps of the stranger, and nothing but a convulsive swell of the frame told that the being thus extended was still numbered among the living. The haughty-miened stranger approached the altar on the other side, and bending before the rude shrine, he poured forth, from the agony of his spirit, a supplication to heaven for mercy and pardon.

"Oh God!" he exclaimed, "and Father of mercy! have mercy on a wretched sinner! Forgive me, gracious King of glory, for my crimes are manifold, and my deeds of evil are hideous in my sight! Let my tears of penitence wash away the stains of my iniquities, and let a stricken and repentant heart find favour in thine eyes."

A sudden movement of the pilgrim interrupted his supplications, and he looked towards him with something like alarm. The palmer stood erect before the startled stranger—his brow was bent, as one in strife and fury, and the lightning of his dark eye was fixed upon him with a terrible and fascinating gaze—his left arm was extended towards the richly-dressed stranger, and his right grasped convulsively at something concealed within the folds of his vesture. He advanced with a rapid and quick stride to within a foot of where the stranger stood.

"We are met alone and face to face at last, Raymond Count of Perilleaux," he almost screamed in tones at once guttural and agitated, yet with the deep voice of a firm and determined man. "Can you pray to heaven?—You, with the blood of innocence crying to that heaven for vengeance against you? Can you ask pardon or hope for mercy, whose heart was shut against the pleadings of the pure and virtuous? Can you hope for peace while my vow of revenge is yet unpaid, and this dagger yet unstained with thy blood, and still rusty with the gore of thy victim? Raymond of Perilleaux, know you not, that while I lived, my life was devoted to your destruction. You have often escaped me, but this is thy last—Nay, stir not—call not. Know you this poinard?" and he drew forth a sharp, blood-stained dagger from his bosom, and advancing it within a few inches of the Count's face, he laid his other hand firmly upon his head to keep him down, for he was still upon his knees—"Look—'tis your own! Now say your last prayer, if you can pray. I cannot pray, and I am not yet a murderer!"

"Have mercy, Ugolino!" uttered Raymond in a trembling and distracted voice.

"Mercy from me?—Ha, ha, ha!" and he laughed with mingled rage and derision. "Dastard! murderer! this is the mercy which you have given, and this is the mercy which you shall receive!"

He raised the dagger above his head for the fatal plunge; but, with the desperation of a hopeless man, the Count sprang at the lifted arm. He was still in the strength of his days, for though his brow was sprinkled with white hairs, his frame was sinewy and unbent, and his step was active and firm. He seized the palmer by the wrist of that hand which held the weapon of destruction; but the grasp of the agile pilgrim was as instantly on his throat, and with an overpowering strength he bore him back against the wall. The despair of the Count nerved him with supernatural powers. He still gripped with both his hands the arm that held the blood-stained poinard; but the pilgrim still firmly clung to his throat with a dreadful ferocity. The struggle was terrible!—terrible to look upon! On the one hand, the fury of the palmer working upon his worn yet marked features, and lighting up his fierce eyes with an expression of the most enraged and demoniac malignity; on the other, the black and swollen countenance of the Count, on which were marked the extremes of horror and despair—the bursting veins upon the forehead—the eye-balls starting from their sockets—and the convulsed frame working in the dying struggles. It was horrible! Never had the rude walls of the cell witnessed such a contest! At length the strength of the gasping Count began to give way—his hold on the upraised arm waxed faint—his breath became short, strained, and thick, and with a fainting step he again gave way against

* The Priory of St. Fintan's, or Daboc, was situated in another but a larger island than where the cell was built. A canon from the Priory was always resident on the Island of Purgatory, to receive, direct, and exhort the pilgrims and devotees.

the spumy wall. He was even sinking, when the palmer, wrenching away his hand with a sudden effort, buried the poinard in an instant to the very hilt in the bosom of the wretched Count. He plucked it forth again, reeking and smoking with the warm heart's blood, and then he let go his hold on the throat of the unfortunate Raymond. He never groaned—his lips merely moved and twitched, but no murmur came to his tongue. His eyes became fixed in vacant earnestness—he staggered forward a few paces, and fell heavily against the steps of the little altar, where he expired. * * *

Years passed away, and no one could tell what had become of him who had committed the murder at the holy shrine of St. Patrick, until some workmen, in making alterations in the Birmingham Tower, Castle of Dublin, discovered a manuscript, written in Italian, of which the following is a translation :

"It is well—all is over now—and my country and my friends have rejected and disowned me, and the stranger looks upon his prisoner—the sacrilegious murderer—with eyes of horror. The rude walls of this dungeon are now the confines of my palace-domain, and its cold flags are my couch of repose. Thus will it be while life remains with Ugolino di Castella. But I embrace the galling chain that fetters my limbs, and I bless the rugged walls that confine me. I have given my heart its full revenge—its cherished and its long-sought revenge ! I saw him die !—yes, I saw the dread of his soul turn his face pale with terror—I grasped his felon throat, and beheld his eye-balls start with pain beneath the force of my pressure—and my heart swelled joyously at the sight, and my hand grasped him closer and firmer. I buried the poinard, red with the blood of a sainted martyr, deep, deep into his bosom. I plucked it forth, and saw his blood fall drop by drop from the reeking blade. I heard the last sigh escape from his writhing lips ; and I laughed, for it was a sight of joy to me. Madoline of Perilleaux, thou art revenged !!! * * *

"My family is noble, ranking for honour and antiquity with the most noble in Italy. My elder brother, the Count di Castella, inheriting the titles and wealth of the family, I had to win a name and riches with my sword. The war with the Moslem then drew all the young and gallant spirits of Europe within its vortex, and never did Christian fortitude and Christian bravery obtain such a triumph over the dark infidel. It was then I first met with Raymond Count of Perilleaux, while defending the towers of Rhodes from the desperate attack of the infatuated Mahomedans. I saved his life. He then had a name as a leader of skill and prudence, and whose counsel had more than once proved beneficial to the Christian cause. When the flames of war had been extinguished, we returned in company to the banks of the blue rolling Rhine. There I first saw Madoline, and there my young heart first bowed itself before the majesty of beauty and grace. She was all—she was every thing—but it is idle to speak of her now. That dream never returns to my waking fancy without bringing torture and misery to my soul, like the fiend that dwells in the breast of the envious man. Still I love the thought, for it is of Madeline. We loved !—loved ! Love is too tame to depict the depth and intensity of the all-absorbing passion with which we held each other dearer than life or heaven. But a union could not be dreamt of. I was poor—she rich above price ; and the being in whom my soul was centered I dare not woo. But what was left to us then—the madness and the intemperance of the passion, and we were betrayed. Her cool, crafty, and treacherous brother vowed a terrible vengeance, and the innocent fell the victim. It was on a calm and mellow autumn evening ; the vineyards had given up their rich harvest, and the woods were deep-tinged with the rich and varied hues which we so much admire, when, as I flew to a lovely bower in the garden of the castle, my steps were arrested by the voice of Raymond, issuing in tones of anger from the thick and tangled arbour. I paused, and a chilling tremor crept over me, which I felt prophetic.

"Yes, Raymond," she exclaimed, 'I love him ! We are even now united by bonds and ties as dear as those of wedlock ; and nothing shall separate us.'

"An awful pause followed—awful to me.

"Is the honour of our family then tainted by thee," said he, 'thou reptile of infamy ?'

"Is he not honourable and brave ?" she replied ; 'did he not save your life when you were beaten down by the arm of a common Moslem soldier ?'

"Insult on insult !" he cried with a tone of fury—'Contempt added to disgrace ! Die, then, for the honour of the house of Perilleaux !'

"I heard one shriek, and no more. I drew my sword, and rushed to the spot.

"'Coward, murderer !' I exclaimed, as I madly entered the arbour ; but he fled away, and I turned to where the bleeding Madoline was extended, with the poinard of her brother buried deep in her bosom. She could not speak—all was over ; and I called on her name in the same unconsciousness as the wolves howl to the moon. She never spoke to me again. I pulled the poinard from her bosom, and the hot blood followed fast. I then swore never to know rest or peace—never to follow motive, or yield to inducement—never to seek repose, but when worn out nature conquered the thirst of vengeance—until that very poinard should be buried as deep within the false bosom of the foul murderer. I followed him from land to land—I haunted his footsteps night and day : the wide sea parted us, but I still was on his track—deserts separated us—like the blood-hound, I traced his path over plain and forest—until we met in the lonely cell. * * *

"My hours are numbered, and my wretched day of existence is dim with the shadow of the night of death. This is the last I shall write. Vain and false world, farewell—farewell !"

J. L. L.

SONG OF POOR MOINA, THE MANIAC.

Air—The *Caoine*, or Funeral Dirge of the Co. Monaghan.

"I've called my love, but he still sleeps on,
And his lips are as cold as clay ;
I've kissed them o'er and o'er again—
I have pressed his cheek with my burning brow,
And I've watched o'er him all the day.
Is it then true that no more thou'lt smile

On Moina ?

Art thou then lost to thy Moina ?

"Dear was our cottage and garden to me
When the hand of the spoiler came ;
Bright was the dew on my loved rose-tree—
Every leaf looked green as an emerald bright
Enclosed in a diamond frame.
Withered that tree where my love first wooed
His Moina !

But more withered the heart of poor Moina !

"I once had a lamb my love gave me—
As the mountain snow, 'twas white :
Oh, how I loved it nobody knows !
I decked it each morn with the myrtle and rose—
With "Forget-me-not" at night.

My lover they slew—and they tore my lamb
From Moina !

They pierced the heart's core of poor Moina !"

A linnet sang sweet on a bough hard-by,
Then flew past the hapless maid—
"Tis my love," she cried—"his voice I know !"
And she followed the bird to the valley below,
And was lost in the evening shade.
Slowly and heavily home I turned

From Moina—

And wept o'er the fate of poor Moina.

MARGARETTA.

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